R E P O R T  R E S U M E S

ED 019 198 RE 001 220

BASAL READER PROGRAMS--HOW DO THEY STAND TODAY.

BY- STAIGER, RALPH C.

PUB DATE APR 68

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.64 14P.

DESCRIPTORS- *READING MATERIALS, *BASIC READING, READING RESEARCH, *READING INSTRUCTION, WORD RECOGNITION, ORAL READING, SILENT READING, READABILITY,

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BASAL READER FROM ITS BEGINNINGS IN THE LATE 1700'S TO ITS STATUS IN THE GRADED SCHOOLS OF TODAY IS SURVEYED. THE MCGUFFEY READERS ARE CITED AS THE FIRST CAREFULLY GRADED SERIES OF ONE READER FOR EACH GRADE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. SINCE THEN, CHANGES IN CONTENT, TYPOGRAPHY, IN QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF ILLUSTRATIONS, BINDING, AND IN SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS HAVE BEEN RADICAL. THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF READING AND THE MEASUREMENT OF READING ABILITY HAVE GIVEN RISE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF SILENT READING, THE TEACHER'S MANUAL, AND SUPPLEMENTARY SEATWORK MATERIALS. PRESENTLY, THE MOST TELLING CRITICISMS OF BASAL SYSTEMS CONCERN THE LACK OF INCORPORATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS IN THEIR METHODOLOGY. FIFTEEN COUCLUSIONS ARE PRESENTED AS IMPORTANT INFLUENCES WHICH MAY SHAPE THE PRIMARY LEVEL BASIC READER PROGRAM OF THE FUTURE. QUESTIONS ARE POSED CONCERNING THE INFLUENCE OF HIGH SPEED TECHNOLGOY, COMPUTER-ASSISTED INSTRUCTION, AND TELEVISION UPON THE ADOPTION OF NEW IDEAS INTO BASAL READERS. REFERENCES ARE LISTED.

ED019198

Ralph C. Staiger
University of Delaware

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

[INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION, BOSTON, APR. 24-27, 1968]

# BASAL READER PROGRAMS: HOW DO THEY STAND TODAY?

Only a few years ago it was incomprehensible to many teachers that reading could be taught without the use of basal readers. In the last decade we have seen many innovative methods which have used other approaches to learning to read. A summary of some of these has just been published by the International Reading Association, entitled A Decade of Innovations: Approaches to Beginning Reading. This was one of the outcomes of our last convention, during which a series of meetings on this topic was held. I shall not at this time list these innovations, but will leave them to your reading. We are to discuss basal readers today.

George Santayana once suggested that the man who does not know history is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. It would appear that we should examine the kinds of materials which have been used in other times by children learning to read. Again, there are references which will provide an excellent background in the history of reading instruction, such as Nila Banton Smith's American Reading Instruction also published by IRA and Mitford Matthews'

RE 001 220

Teaching to Read: Historically Considered issued by the University of Chicago Press. Letters were traced in sand, dust, clay, and wax and wooden tiles were used by pupils learning their letters even before the first century. The Horn Book, with its protective sheath of cow's horn to protect the precious piece of paper with inscribed letters, syllables and religious selections was known to many children in Europe and America.

The primer's name, according to Smith, was derived not from the fact that it was the child's first book, but because it contained, in the Middle Ages, the primary essentials of religious knowledge--the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and a few Psalms. Gradually the alphabet, lists of syllables and words were added to this religious manual and it became the standard book of instruction in reading.

During the late Middle Ages the ABC book developed; this might be considered the textbook edition of the primer which, after all, was not a school book, but an expensive manual for use in church services. The fifteenth century Enschude Abecedarium contained the alphabet, the Pater Noster, the Ave Maria, the Credo, and two prayers.

It is important to remember that these progenitors of modern readers, primer, the hornbook, and the ABC book, developed together and were derived from one another.

American Readers

The New England Primer, which went through twenty-two editions from 1727 to 1776, was the first book designed for schools in the American colonies. It was a very popular book, but was eventually supplanted as an instructional tool by various spellers, the most noteworthy of which was Noah Webster's The American Spelling Book, which was really one of a series of three readers

which evolved out of the sections of his 1783 publication, Grammatical Institute. Section I was the spelling and reading beginner's book, Section II contained a treatise on grammar, and section III, designed for advanced instruction in academies, included "An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking." The parts were printed separately in 1790, and an intermediate reader was soon found necessary. The Little Reader's Assistant which bridged the gap between the "blue back speller" and the advanced book of readings became the first set of consecutive readers in the history of American reading instruction. Thus our basal reading series began, soon to be followed by Caleb Bingham's readers, Lyman Cobb's readers, George Hilliard's readers, Lindley Murray's readers, and others.

During the 1840's and '50's the graded school was evolving, which encouraged the writers of graded series of readers. The Pestalozzian emphasis on object teaching and nature encouraged pictures and realistic content, with attention to the principle of moving from the simple to the complex. The flowering of the development of systematic readers was a natural outgrowth of these influences.

There was also a movement in the direction of the word method, as opposed to the alphabetic method of teaching beginning reading in the 1840's. The first readers which used this method were those of Josiah Bumstead. Most of the teachers in the country continued to used the alphabet method because the majority of textbooks in use advocated it. Many heated debates developed between advocates of the two methods, forerunners of the debates and arguments which were to rage over other methods in later decades, and which are still in evidence.

The McGuffey Readers were the first carefully graded series consisting of one reader for each grade in the elementary school. They also provided for

repetition of new words on a more than haphazard basis. Their enormous popularity from 1836 to 1875 did not diminish until the 1907 edition appeared. We still hear of people who insist that their children be taught by the McGuffey Readers. Significantly, the edition is rarely specified.

I shall not attempt to trace the development of basal readers from McGuffey to the present, except to point out that a number of influences contributed to changes in these textbooks through the years. Apparent to the observer are not only changes in content, in typography, in quantity and quality of illustration, in binding, and in supplemental materials in a series, but also in the way in which the readers were expected to help a pupil learn to read--the method.

Elaborate phonetic methods appeared as a reaction to the word methods of mid-nineteenth century. Controversy between synthetic and analytic approaches to phonics flourished, diacritical markings, and even augmented alphabets appeared in some series. The word method was expanded into the sentence and the story method. Each series reflected the authors' concern for teaching the users of the books to read. The more popular series appeared to be successful in their mission and, equally important, were attractive and workable in the eyes of the teachers who used them.

It is the quality of saleability which helped shape many of the series. Only during the last few decades has the evidence of research had a direct influence upon the content and methods used in basal reading programs. Studies of the interests of children were reflected in the Elson Readers in 1909, which corresponded with the beginnings of research in reading. We must remember that Gray reported that only 34 studies in reading had been conducted from 1884 until 1910, and 14 of these were reported from 1906-1910.

Other changes which resulted from the scientific study of reading were the recognition of the possibility of measuring reading ability and an emphasis on teaching silent reading as opposed to oral reading, which heretofore had been almost exclusively used in the teaching of reading. Oral reading is today still the most important tool of many teachers throughout the world, especially in those countries in which education is underdeveloped.

The rise of silent reading brought about the teacher's manual which, if its suggestions were followed, helped the teacher make better use of the series. Teaching silent reading, for most teachers of the 1920's and 1930's, was such a new idea that most authors considered manuals a necessary adjunct of their materials, and publishers provided them without charge to teachers using their books.

In the wake of the silent reading revolution came supplementary seat work in the form of flash cards, silent reading exercise books, and workbooks. When experience charts for beginning reading were introduced they, too, were incorporated into basal reading programs. The preprimer was provided as a means of preparing children for the arduous task of reading the primer. Eventually, readiness materials and manuals were incorporated into many series. Each of these innovations was introduced as an educationally useful tool, but also as a product which met a need which had been expressed by teachers, the ultimate purchasers of the product.

If a series was not useful and attractive to the customers, it was not successful. I have seen the sales records of such a series of readers. The first year after publication, sales were excellent. The authors were well regarded, the ideas behind the series sound, and the sales force active. But during the second year, there was a dramatic drop in sales. Upon frantic investigation, the publisher's representatives found that neither pupils nor

teachers liked the books. They found them on storage shelves, unused. A large investment of intellectual energy as well as money had gone into this series, but they failed to achieve their purpose because of this fatal flaw.

What Does Research Say?

One of the most telling criticisms of basal reading systems in Jeanne Chall's Learning to Read: The Great Debate is that they do not incorporate the findings of research in their methodology. What are the findings of research?

Properly, all reading research is grist for the mill which produces basal readers. This indeed has been the case. Those individuals who have led the building of readers have for the most part been very much aware of that research in reading which is appropriate to their purposes. Unfortunately, as most of us know, much of the published reading research has been pedestrian, poorly controlled and in need of careful evaluation before being used.

In the confusion of unclear findings, conflicting conclusions, and hazy implications, the publishers who planned an investment of several million dollars in a series of basal readers looked at the research and then listened carefully to what their customers wanted. Most series of readers were built by educational realists, and are used by teachers who are faced with the realities of the classroom.

We can only encourage, as Jeanne Chall suggests, "...series of coordinated laboratory as well as extensive longitudinal studies--studies that can give us some definitive answers so that we don't keep researching the same issues over and over again."

The research studies which relate specifically to basal readers were relatively few. An examination of the literature revealed only 217 such

studies, 161 of which were conducted before 1948. Although categorizing these studies is not always valid--some studies do not lend themselves to discrete classification--Table I indicates the relative grouping of these studies.

TABIE I

Categories of Studies Relating to Basal Readers
1890-1947

| Category | Number of Studies |
|---|---|
| Vocabulary analysis or comparison | 59 |
| Content analysis or comparison | 49 |
| Method analysis or comparison | 41 |
| General treatment | 33 |
| Criteria for selection | 10 |
| Readability | 8 |
| Physical characteristics | 5 |
| Amplification of content | 5 |
| Interest characteristics | 4 |
| Preparation of readers | 3 |

The ease with which words can be counted is probably one reason for the great number of vocabulary studies. A great many of them were masters' theses. The concern for selecting wisely was not reflected only in the "Criteria for Selection" category. The purpose of many of the vocabulary and content analysis studies was obviously to obtain data for selection of materials. This reason could be gleaned from the titles of the studies. All of the "Amplification of Content" studies appeared before series included supplementary materials.

A surge in comparative studies of methodology appeared in 1967, when the U.S. Office of Education-sponsored first grade studies began to appear. In the report of the Coordinating Center of the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction, the Basal Reading Program reached the status of being used as a bench-mark against which each of the less traditional non-basal programs was measured. Bond and Dykstra said, "The basal reading

program...was considered an entity even though the programs of many publishers were used. The various sets of materials in this category posses most, if not all, of the following characteristics:

1. Vocabulary is introduced slowly and repeated often. Vocabulary control is based on frequency of usage rather than on regularity of sound-symbol relationships.
2. Phonic analysis is introduced gradually and usually only after some "sight" words have been taught. However, from the beginning the child is encouraged to use such other word recognition skills as context, structural analysis and picture clues.
3. Emphasis from the beginning is placed not only on word recognition but on comprehension and interpretation of what is read.
4. Silent reading is emphasized early in the program.
5. The various reading skills are introduced and developed systematically.
6. A well-known Basic Reading Series is used as the major instructional tool."

This description is a useful summary of the characteristics of present-day basal reading programs at the primary level. The basal reader method as an entity has important weaknesses when utilized as a criterion or control method for a statistical treatment of differences in test scores, however. The individualistic nature of the studies whose data were turned over to the Center was dictated by Washington and the Coordinating Center had to do the best it could with the data it received. If the design of the 27 constituent studies had been controlled by the Center, a more realistic methodology would doubtless have been utilized.

The findings of the Coordinating Center were voluminous, and appeared in the Summer Issue, 1967 of the Reading Research Quarterly. A summary of

the 15 conclusions related to the methodology includes several which relate specifically to basal reading programs, but all are important enough to be mentioned at this time, for they are the influences which will shape the primary level basal reader program of the future:

1. Word study skills must be emphasized and taught systematically regardless of what approach to initial reading instruction is used.

2. Combinations of programs, such as a basal program with supplementary phonics materials, often are superior to single approaches. Furthermore, the success of such methods as the Language Experience approach indicates that the addition of language experiences to any kind of reading program can be expected to make a contribution.

3. Innovative programs such as Linguistic readers are especially effective in the word recognition area. The superiority of these programs to basal programs is not as evident in the area of comprehension. It is likely that basal programs should develop a more intensive word study skills element, while programs which put major emphasis on word recognition should increase attention paid to other reading skills.

4. It is necessary for teachers to make differential expectations concerning mean achievement of boys and girls. On the average, boys cannot be expected to achieve at the same level as girls, at least with the materials, methods, and teachers involved in this investigation. A probable explanation from the data of this study is that boys are less ready to read when they enter school.

5. Boys and girls do not profit uniquely from any of the programs utilized in this investigation. On the average, girls' achievement is superior to boys' no matter what approach to beginning reading is used.

6. Reading programs are not equally effective in all situations. Evidently, factors other than method, within a particular learning situation, influence pupil success in reading.

7. Reading achievement is related to other characteristics in addition to those investigated in this study. Pupils in certain school systems became better readers than pupils in other school systems even when pupil characteristics were controlled statistically. Furthermore, these differences in achievement from project to project do not seem to be directly related to the class, school, teacher, and community characteristics appraised in this study.

8. Pupils taught to read by means of a transitional alphabet such as i.t.a. may experience greater difficulty making the transition to traditional orthography in spelling than they do in reading. Longitudinal information is necessary to study this problem.

9. Future research might well center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than method and materials. The tremendous range among classrooms within any method points out the importance of elements in the learning situation over and above the methods employed. To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials.

10. Children learn to read by a variety of materials and methods. Pupils become successful readers in such vastly different programs as the Language Experience approach with its relative lack of structure and vocabulary control and the various Linguistic programs with their relatively high degree of structure and vocabulary control. Furthermore, pupils experienced difficulty in each of the programs utilized. No one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively.

11. The expectation of pupil accomplishment in initial reading instruction probably should be raised. Programs which introduced words at a more rapid pace tended to produce pupils with superior word recognition abilities at the end of the first grade. Children today tend to be better equipped for reading instruction when they enter first grade than they were some years ago and they are probably prepared to learn more words and develop more mature study skills than are currently expected of them in many programs.

12. Indications are that the initial reading vocabulary should be selected with a greater balance between phonetically regular words and high utility words. It is likely that introducing words solely on the basis of frequency of use presents an unusually complex decoding task for the beginning reader. On the other hand, it appears that presenting only phonetically regular words makes it very difficult to write meaningful material.

13. A writing component is likely to be an effective addition to a primary reading program. In the first place, the Language Experience approach, which involves considerable written expression, was an effective program of instruction. In addition, programs such as i.t.a. and Phonic/Linguistic, both of which were relatively effective, encourage pupils to write symbols as they learn to recognize them and to associate them with sounds. This appears helpful to the pupil in learning sound-symbol relationships. Furthermore, it is likely that writing such common, but irregular, words as the helps the child to commit them to his sight vocabulary.

14. It is impossible to assess the relative effectiveness of programs unless they are used in the same project. Project differences are so great, even when pupil readiness for reading is controlled, that a program utilized in a favored project would demonstrate a distinct advantage over one used in a less favored project regardless of the effectiveness of the program.

15. The relative success of the non-basal programs compared to the basal programs indicates that reading instruction can be improved. It is likely that improvement would result from adopting certain elements from each of the approaches used in this study. The first step would be to determine the elements within the various approaches most important to the success of that program. For example, the i.t.a. and Phonic/Linguistic programs, both of which were relatively effective, have in common a vocabulary controlled on sound-symbol regularity, introduction of a relatively large reading vocabulary, and emphasis on writing symbols as a means of learning them. It would be interesting to know which of these elements, if any, are primarily responsible for the effectiveness of the program. Perhaps an instructional program which incorporated the most important elements of all of the approaches used in the study would be a more effective method of teaching than any currently in use.

Change is in the offering, as it has been since Noah Webster wrote the books which were the progenitors of our present-day basal readers. Each change came from a variety of sources--the political and cultural atmosphere of the time, the ideas of an educational innovator, the importation of an idea from another country, or the findings of scientific research. As these ideas came upon the scene, the nature of the readers in use in the schools changed, provided that the pupils and teachers who used them found them acceptable.

Similarly the Hindu religion of India has changed over the course of many centuries. When a new religious idea appeared, it was eventually absorbed into the pantheon, and, depending upon its acceptability with the people, was incorporated into the religious life of the country.

Regrettably, many new ideas in reading have taken on a religious aspect.

The fervor of their disciples has overshadowed, in many instances, the light the idea has cast. But those which have been found useful have remained--usually in the pages of a basal reader, or in supplementary materials, or in the suggestions made in a teacher's manual.

Change will continue to take place in basal readers. But one new phenomenon has appeared on the horizon. Jerome Wiesner, Dean of Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, recently was reported to have said, "We have actually entered a new era of evolutionary history, one in which rapid change is a dominant consequence. Our only hope is to understand the forces at work and to take advantage of the knowledge we find."

The change of the past was an evolutionary one, in which gradual acceptance could be waited for. Will gradualism in the adoption of new ideas in basal readers be possible in the era in which we now live? Will the knowledge of the high speed technology which surrounds us--computer-assisted instruction, and television, for instance--permit the gradual adoption of new ideas into basal readers? Time alone will tell. At present, the educational market provides adequate profits for investments in major projects such as basal readers. Will this also hold in five years?

The future will be disquieting to those who abhor change, but it will be interesting.

## References


1. Betts, Emmett A. and Thelma Marshall Betts. An Index to Professional Literature on Reading and Related Topics. New York: American Book Company, 1945.

2. Bond, Guy L., and Robert Dykstra. "The Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading", Reading Research Quarterly II (Summer 1967), pp 5-142.

3. Chall, Jeanne S. Learning to Read. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1967.

4. Mathews, M. M. Teaching to Read: Historically Considered. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

5. Smith, Nila Banton. American Reading Instruction. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1965.

6. Stolger, Ralph C. "How are Basal Readers Used?" Elementary English, [illegible] (January 1958), pp 44-49.

7. Summers, Edward G., Charles H. Davis, and Catherine Giffin. Published Research Literature in Reading, 1955-1964. Bloomington, Indiana: ERIC/Clearinghouse on Retrieval of Information and Evaluation and Reading, 1968.

8. Summers, Edward G., Charles H. Davis, and Catherine Giffin. Published Research in Reading, 1900-1949. Bloomington, Indiana: ERIC/Clearinghouse on Retrieval of Information and Evaluation on [illegible], 1968.

9. Summers, Edward G., Charles H. Davis, and Catherine Giffin. Published Research in Reading, 1950-1965. Bloomington, Indiana: ERIC/Clearinghouse on Retrieval of Information and Evaluation on Reading, 1967.

10. Vilscek, Elaine (Ed.) A Decade of Innovations: Approaches to Beginning Reading. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1968.